Signature Courses in the College

Signature Courses are intended to introduce College students to exciting themes, ideas, and materials in the humanities and social sciences. They afford unique and memorable learning experiences, exemplary of humanistic inquiry.

They are designed as gateway courses that open up fields and disciplines for further exploration. Thus, Signature Courses have no prerequisites and are open to all College students. While they are conceived as general elective courses, they may count towards departmental major and minor requirements.

Signature Courses in the College Courses

SIGN 26002. Code Making, Code Breaking. 100 Units.
This course investigates the nature and use of codes and ciphers: what they are, how they are constructed and solved, and the significant roles they have played throughout history. We will begin by looking at the development of writing, the most basic tool for encoding thought and experience, and at the techniques for deciphering it. We will then turn to a deeper examination of the ideas and methods of cryptography and cryptanalysis, and their roles in concealing and revealing information in different areas of humanistic inquiry, including literature, religion, and philosophy. Finally, we will turn to the role of code making and code breaking in contemporary society, with particular focus on the development of computation and computational theories of intelligence and the relation between encryption, privacy, and freedom of information in a democratic society.
Instructor(s): Chris Kennedy Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): LING 26010

SIGN 26009. Making and Meaning in the American Musical. 100 Units.
The history of the American musical in the 20th century is paradoxical. While the genre is often denigrated as staging lyrical utopias of romance and adventure allowing audiences to escape depressing quotidian realities, many musicals did seek to engage some of the most pressing social issues of their day. In this course, we will look—and listen—closely to four differing musicals from the 20th century, studying their creative origins, while also analyzing their complex social meanings revealed through the story, music, lyrics, staging, and dance. Among the musicals we will study are Showboat, South Pacific and Sweeney Todd. The course will culminate with a planned class visit to the hit-musical Hamilton on May 16. Greatly subsidized tickets will be offered to each class member.
Instructor(s): Thomas Christensen Terms Offered: Spring
Note(s): To be offered in Spring, 2018.
Equivalent Course(s): TAPS 28467,MUSI 24417

SIGN 26010. Censorship from the Inquisition to the Present. 100 Units.
Collaborative research seminar on the history of censorship and information control, with a focus on the history of books and information technologies. The class will meet in Special Collections, and students will work with the professor to prepare an exhibit, The History of Censorship, to be held in the Special Collections exhibit space in the spring. Students will work with rare books and archival materials, design exhibit cases, write exhibit labels, and contribute to the exhibit catalog. Half the course will focus on censorship in early modern Europe, including the Inquisition, the spread of the printing press, and clandestine literature in the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Special focus on the effects of censorship on classical literature, both newly rediscovered works like Lucretius and lost books of Plato, and authors like Pliny the Elder and Seneca who had been available in the Middle Ages but became newly controversial in the Renaissance. The other half of the course will look at modern and contemporary censorship issues, from wartime censorship, to the censorship of comic books, to digital-rights management, to free speech on our own campus. Students may choose whether to focus their own research and exhibit cases on classical, early modern, modern, or contemporary censorship. This course is part of the College Course Cluster, The Renaissance.
Instructor(s): A. Palmer & S. McManus Terms Offered: Autumn
Prerequisite(s): Admission by consent of instructor
Equivalent Course(s): CLCV 25417,CLAS 35417,HIST 35421,HIPS 25421,CHSS 35421,KNOW 21403,KNOW 31403,RLST 22121,HREL 34309,HIST 25421

SIGN 26011. History of Skepticism. 100 Units.
Before we ask what is true or false, we must ask how we can know what is true or false. This course examines the vital role doubt and philosophical skepticism have played in the Western intellectual tradition, from pre-Socratic Greece through the Enlightenment, with a focus on how Criteria of Truth—what kinds of arguments are considered legitimate sources of certainty—have changed over time. The course will examine dialog between skeptical and dogmatic thinkers, and how many of the most fertile systems in the history of philosophy have been hybrid systems which divided the world into things which can be known, and things which cannot. The course will touch on the history of atheism, heresy and free thought, on fideism and skeptical religion, and will examine how the Scientific Method is itself a form of philosophical skepticism. Primary source readings will include Plato, Sextus Empiricus, Lucretius, Ockham, Pierre Bayle, Montaigne, Descartes, Francis Bacon, Hobbes, Voltaire, Diderot, and others.
Instructor(s): A. Palmer Terms Offered: Winter
Note(s): No prerequisites; first-year students welcome.
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 39516,CLCV 28517,CLAS 38517,HIPS 29516,CHSS 39516,KNOW 21406,KNOW 31406,RLST 22123,HREL 39516,HIST 29516
SIGN 26012. The Underground: Alienation, Mobilization, Resistance. 100 Units.
The ancient and multivalent image of the underground has crystallized over the last two centuries to denote sites of
disaffection from—and strategies of resistance to—dominant social, political and cultural systems. We will trace the
development of this metaphor from the Underground Railroad in the mid-1800s and the French Resistance during World
War II to the Weather Underground in the 1960s-1970s, while also considering it as a literary and artistic concept, from
Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Notes from the Underground and Ellison’s Invisible Man to Chris Marker’s film La Jetée and Andrei
Tarkovsky’s Stalker. Alongside with such literary and cinematic tales, drawing theoretical guidance from refuseniks from
Henry David Thoreau to Guy Debord, this course investigates how countercultural spaces become—or fail to become
—sites of political resistance, and also how dissenting ideologies give rise to countercultural spaces. We ask about the
relation between social deviance (the failure to meet social norms, whether willingly or unwittingly) and political resistance,
especially in the conditions of late capitalism and neo-colonialism, when countercultural literature, film and music (rock,
punk, hip-hop, DIY aesthetics etc.) get absorbed into—and coopted by—the hegemonic socio-economic system. In closing
we will also consider contemporary forms of disidence—from Pussy Riot to Black Lives Matter—that rely both on the
vulnerability of individual bodies and global communication networks.
Instructor(s): Robert Bird Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): REES 36068, CMST 24568, CMST 34568, REES 26068

SIGN 26013. Nietzsche: Culture, Critique, Self-Transcendence. 100 Units.
This course is conceived as an introduction to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). A range of Nietzsche’s work
will be considered, but the focus will be on three themes to which Nietzsche recurred throughout his writing career: 1) Culture: Nietzsche’s thought on the anthropological roots and the expressive forms of human meaning-making. 2) Critique: Nietzsche’s critique of moralism, religion, and the vacuous character of much modern culture. 3) Self-Transcendence: Nietzsche’s account of individual self-realization and freedom. The selection of these themes is motivated by the fact that they may be considered as fundamental dimensions of humanistic inquiry and in this sense the course may be thought of as a pathway to the Humanities. Students will develop a sound understanding of a writer whose intellectual influence continues to grow, but at the same time they will become acquainted with such core concepts of humanistic/interpretive inquiry as form, expression, ideology, genealogy, discourse, self-fashioning, individuality, and value.
Instructor(s): David Wellbery Terms Offered: TBD, Winter
Equivalent Course(s): FNDL 25121, GRMN 25120

SIGN 26015. The First Great Transformation: The Economies of the Ancient World. 100 Units.
This class examines the determinants of economic growth in the ancient world. It covers various cultural areas (especially
Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome and China) from ca. 3000 BCE to c. 500 CE. By contrast with the modern world, ancient
cultures have long been supposed to be doomed to stagnation and routine. The goal of this class is to revisit the old paradigm
with a fresh methodology, which combines a rigorous economic approach and a special attention to specific cultural
achievements. We will assess the factors that indeed weighed against positive growth, but we will also discover that far from
being immobile the cultures of the ancient world constantly invented new forms of social and economic organization. This
was indeed a world where periods of positive growth were followed by periods of brutal decline. But if envisaged on the
longue durée, this was a period of decisive achievements, which provided the basis for the future accomplishments of the
Early Modern and Modern world. This course is part of the College Course Cluster program, Economic History.
Instructor(s): A. Bresson Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 20505, CLCV 20517

SIGN 26017. Roman Law. 100 Units.
The course will treat several problems arising in the historical development of Roman law: the history of procedure;
the rise and accommodation of multiple sources of law, including the emperor; the dispersal of the Roman community from the
environ of Rome to the wider Mediterranean world; and developments in the law of persons. We will discuss problems like
the relationship between religion and law from the archaic city to the Christian empire, and between the law of Rome and the
legal systems of its subject communities. This course is part of the College Course Cluster, History of Law.
Instructor(s): C. Ando Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): CLAS 35808, HIST 21004, HIST 31004, LLSO 21212, CLCV 25808

SIGN 26018. American Deaf Community: Language, Culture, and Society. 100 Units.
This course will focus on the Deaf community that uses American Sign Language (ASL) as a lens into the disciplines
of linguistics, psychology, and cultural studies, and how the use of ASL contributes to individual identity and identity
within society. In addition to these disciplinary foci, topics of Deaf literature and art forms will figure in the discussion and
readings, which come from a variety of sources and include seminal works in the field from historical and contemporary
perspectives.
Instructor(s): Diane Brentari Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): LING 26030
SIGN 26020. Theater about Theater. 100 Units.
This course is a transtistorical study of changing ideas about representation, explored through the lens of early modern and
twentieth-century plays that foreground theatrical form. Every play frames time and space and in the process singles out a
portion of life for consideration. The plays we will consider this term call conspicuous attention to the frame itself, to the
materials and capacities of theater. What happens when plays comment on their own activity? Why might they do so? Why
has theatrical self-consciousness emerged more strongly in particular historical periods? What might such plays teach us
about the nature of art, and about the nature of life? To what extent can we distinguish between art and life? We’ll explore
these and other questions through plays by Marlowe, Kyd, Shakespeare, Maeterlinck, Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett, Genet,
Peter Weiss, Handke, Levine, and Baker; and through theoretical work by Abel, Puchner, Hornby, Sofer, Fuchs, and others.

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Instructor(s): J. Muse
Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): TAPS 28431, ENGL 24412

SIGN 26021. Listening to Movies. 100 Units.
This course shifts our critical attention from watching movies to listening to them. Amid a strong emphasis on cinema—
ranging from musical accompaniment during the silent era to sound in experimental films; or from classical Hollywood
underscoring to Bollywood musical numbers—we will consider the soundtrack of moving pictures within a growing
variety of audiovisual media, including television, music videos, and computer games. Interactive lectures (Mondays
and Wednesdays) and discussion sections (Fridays) combine a historical overview with transhistorical perspectives.
Supplemented by screenings and readings, the course will address a variety issues and topics: aesthetic and psychological
(such as representation, narration, affect); cultural and political (such as race, ethnicity, propaganda); social and economic
(such as technology, production, dissemination).

Instructor(s): Berthold Hoeckner
Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): MUSI 20918

SIGN 26022. Mesopotamian Law. 100 Units.
Ancient Mesopotamia -- the home of the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians who wrote in cuneiform script on durable
clay tablets -- was the locus of many of history’s “firsts.” No development, however, may be as important as the formations
of legal systems and legal principles revealed in contracts, trial records, and law collections (“codes”), among which “The
Laws of Hammurabi” (r. 1792-1750 BC) stands as most important for understanding subsequent legal practice and thought
of Mesopotamia’s cultural heirs in the Middle East and Europe until today. This course will explore the rich source materials
of the Laws and relevant judicial and administration documents (all in English translations) to investigate topics of legal,
social, and economic practice including family formation and dissolution, crime and punishment (sympathetic or talionic
“eye for an eye,” pecuniary, corporal), and procedure (contracts, trials, ordeals). This course is part of the College Course
Cluster, History of Law.

Instructor(s): Martha Roth
Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): LLSS 20019, NEHC 20019, NEHC 30019

SIGN 26025. Grimm’s Fairy Tales and the Construction of Childhood. 100 Units.
This course will study fairy tales within the broader context of the history of childhood and practices of education and
socialization. Therefore, we will address issues such as the varying historical conceptions of the child, and the role of
adults – parents and pedagogues – in the shaping of fairy tales for the instruction of children. In addition to our main focus
on the socializing forces directed at children in our world we will explore different interpretive approaches, including those that place
fairy tales against the backdrop of folklore, of literary history, of psychoanalysis, of the history of gender roles. While we
will consider fairy tales drawn from a number of different national traditions and historical periods, we will concentrate
on the German context and in particular on Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm’s contribution to this genre. In order to reflect on
the specific mediality of fairy tales, we will examine the evolution of specific tale types and trace their history from oral
traditions through print to film. Last but not least, we will have to consider the potential strategies for reinterpreting and
rewriting a genre that continues to shape the cultural imaginary today. Readings and discussions in English (German texts
will be available in the original).

Instructor(s): Christopher Wild
Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): FNDL 22311, GRMN 25413

SIGN 26026. Arab America. 100 Units.
In this course, we will read a variety of texts that imagine or represent the Arab experience of exile to and diaspora within
the United States, focusing on the ways that these texts re-construct and imagine the key dialectic of home/diasporic space,
specifically within the framework of the complicated and dynamic relationship between the Arab world and the United
States. Throughout the quarter, the readings would enable us to engage with several key concepts related to the Arab (and
broader) immigrant experience in the US, including race, memory and nostalgia, language, and second-generational post-
memory, as well as the role of the immigrant community in forming the ‘homeland’s’ vision of itself. We would begin with
a historical overview of emigration from the Arabic-speaking world, beginning with the vast emigration of Lebanese and
Syrians from Mount Lebanon and Syria in the mid-nineteenth century, but will pay particular attention to moments in which
this identity has been or become particularly fraught, for example, following such events as the 1967 war, the 9/11 attacks,
or the recent Executive Order by the Trump Administration (1/2017).

Instructor(s): Ghenwa Hayek
Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): NEHC 20921, NEHC 30921
SIGN 26028. The History of Iraq in the 20th Century. 100 Units.
The class explores the history of Iraq during the years 1917-2015. We will discuss the rise of the Iraqi nation state, Iraqi and Pan-Arab nationalism, and Iraqi authoritarianism. The class will focus on the unique histories of particular group in Iraqi society; religious groups (Shiis, Sunnis, Jews), ethnic groups (especially Kurds), classes (the urban poor, the educated middle classes, the landed and tribal elites), Iraqi women, and Iraqi tribesmen. Other classes will explore the ideologies that became prominent in the Iraqi public sphere, from communism to Islamic radicalism. We will likewise discuss how colonialism and imperialism shaped major trends in Iraqi history. The reading materials for the class are based on a combination of primary and secondary sources: we will read together Iraqi novels, memoirs and poems (in translation), as well as British and American diplomatic documents about to Iraq.
Instructor(s): Ori Bashkin
Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): NEHC 26151, NEHC 36151

SIGN 26029. Media and Power in the Age of Putin and Trump. 100 Units.
Over the past 200 years, various political and cultural regimes of Russia have systematically exploited the gap between experience and representation to create their own mediated worlds—from the tight censorship of the imperial and Soviet periods to the propaganda of the Soviet period and the recent use of media simulacra for strategic geopolitical advantage. During this same period state control of media has been used to seclude Russia from the advancement of liberalism, market economics, individual rights, modernist art, Freud, Existentialism, and, more recently, Western discourses of inclusion, sustainability, and identity. Examining this history, it is sometimes difficult to discern whether the architects of Russian culture have been hopelessly backward or shrewd phenomenologists, keenly aware of the relativity of experience and of their ability to shape it. This course will explore the worlds that these practices produce, with an emphasis on Russia's recent confrontations with Western culture and power, and including various practices of subversion of media control, such as illegal printing and circulation. Texts for the course will draw from print, sound, and visual media, and fields of analysis will include aesthetics, cultural history, and media theory.
Instructor(s): William Nickell
Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): REES 25603

SIGN 26030. The Language of Deception and Humor. 100 Units.
In this course we will examine the language of deception and humor from a variety of perspectives: historical, developmental, neurological, and cross-cultural and in a variety of contexts: fiction, advertising, politics, courtship, and everyday conversation. We will focus on the (linguistic) knowledge and skills that underlie the use of humor and deception, and on what sorts of things they are used to communicate.
Instructor(s): Jason Riggle
Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): LING 23920, LING 33920

SIGN 26031. The Nuclear Age. 100 Units.
Seventy-five years ago a group of scientists launched the first sustained nuclear chain reaction, commonly known as CP-1, at the University of Chicago under Stagg Field. This course will be part of the commemoration and reflection taking place across the University this fall. Its goal will be to explore the ensuing Nuclear Age from different disciplinary perspectives by organizing a ring-lecture. Each week’s lecture, delivered by faculty from fields across the university (for instance, Physics, Biomedicine, Anthropology, and English), will be followed by a discussion section to synthesize and integrate not only the material from the weekly lectures, but the many events happening at the University this fall. CP-1 was not only a scientific achievement of the highest magnitude, but also a civilization-changing event that remains at the boundary of the thinkable.
Instructor(s): D. L. Nelson
Terms Offered: Autumn
Prerequisite(s): Second, third, or fourth-year standing.
Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 26030, HIST 25424, BPRO 26030

SIGN 26032. The Discovery of Egypt in the Age of European Enlightenment. 100 Units.
The discovery of Egypt in the age of European Enlightenment and its aftermath
Instructor(s): Nadine Moeller
Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): NEHC 20060
Font Notice

This document should contain certain fonts with restrictive licenses. For this draft, substitutions were made using less legally restrictive fonts. Specifically:

- Times was used instead of Trajan.
- Times was used instead of Palatino.

The editor may contact Leepfrog for a draft with the correct fonts in place.